THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF HUMAN RESOURCE DEVELOPMENT [DR. (SHRIMATI) RITA VERMA]: (a) to (c) The information is being collected and will be laid on the Table of the House.

Average of Ophthalmologists, Optometrists and Optionans in the country

799. SHRI C. RAMACHANDRAIAH: Will the Minister of HEALTH AND FAMILY WELFARE be pleased to state:

(a) whether it is a fact that for one billion population of the country, there are only 10,000 Opthalmologists, 5,000 Optometrists and 20,000 Optionans, which is less than the world average;

(b) if so, the national and world average; and

(c) the action proposed to be taken to fill the gap?

THE MINISTER OF HEALTH AND FAMILY WELFARE (DR. C. P. THAKUR): (a) It is estimated that there are over 11000 eye surgeons and over 6000 Opththalmic Assistants in India. No. of optometrists and opticians is not known.

(b) The eye surgeon population ratio in India is 1 eye surgeon per lakh population which is better as compared to other developing countries. In developed countries, 1 eye surgeon is available for less than 1 lakh population.

(c) Under the Vision 2020: The Right to Sight initiative, the plan of action for India is being formulated which includes appropriate Human Resource Development for Eye Care at various levels.

Report of Vision of Improvement Expert Working Council

800. SHRI C. RAMACHANDRAIAH: Will the Minister of HEALTH AND FAMILY WELFARE be pleased to state:

(a) whether Government are aware of the report of Vision of Improvement Expert Working Council stating that 40 per cent of the youth in Delhi cannot see clearly;

(b) if so, whether Government would get a similar survey conducted in all parts of the country; and

(c) what strategies are being evolved to tackle the vision problem particularly of the youth?

THE MINISTER OF HEALTH AND FAMILY WELFARE (DR. C. P. THAKUR): (a) No, Sir.

(b) A survey on Childhood Blindness was conducted in Delhi earlier this year by the team from AIIMS. There is no proposal to conduct similar surveys in other parts.

(c) School Eye Screening Programme under NPCB is being undertaken throughout the country for detection and correction of refractive errors.

Review of guidelines on small pox vaccination

801. SHRI P. PRABHAKAR REDDY: Will the Minister of HEALTH AND FAMILY WELFARE be pleased to state:

(a) whether the World Health Organisation (WHO) has called on the member countries to review the guidelines on small pox vaccination in the light of the prevailing apprehension that people may be infected deliberately with the small pox virus as part of germ warfare;

(b) if so, the details thereof; and

(c) the steps proposed to be taken by India to deal with the possible threats by the biological and chemical warfare in the wake of September 11 attack on New York and Washington?

THE MINISTER OF HEALTH AND FAMILY WELFARE (DR. C. P. THAKUR): (a) and (b) WHO has recently updated the official guidance, stating that "Existing vaccines have proven efficacy but also have a high incidence of adverse side-effects. The risk of adverse events is sufficiently high that mass vaccination is not warranted if there is no or little real risk of exposure. Individual countries that have reason to believe that their people face an increased risk of small pox because of deliberate use of the virus are considering options for increasing their access to vaccines. The vaccines would be given to people who are at risk of exposure to small pox, including health and civil workers, and would be used in a search and containment exercise should an outbreak occur."

(c) A meeting on chemical and bioterrorism was organised by the Ministry of Health & Family Welfare in the recent past, in which Secretaries of Home and Health from various States/Union Territories participated. They have taken stock of the preparedness to face any situation including availability of drugs and all the States/UTs have been asked to strengthen their public health system to handle the situation effectively.

Backlog of vacancies reserved for SCs/STs and OBCs

802. SHRI RAJU PARMAR: Will the Minister of HEALTH AND FAMILY WELFARE be pleased to state: